

## **Minutes - King County Rural Forest Commission Meeting Thursday, September 11, 2014, Preston Community Center**

Commissioners present: Nate Veranth, forest landowner (Chair); Dick Ryon, North Bend resident; Rex Thompson, forester; Ron P. Baum, forest landowner; Doug McClelland, Washington Department of Natural Resources; Daryl Harper, forest landowner; Bernie McKinney, forest landowner; Brandy Reed, King Conservation District; Cindy Spiry, Snoqualmie Tribe

Guests: Eric Richardson, Hancock Timber Management; Grady Steere, Hancock Timber Management

Staff: Alan Painter, Department of Natural Resources and Parks; David Kimmett, Parks and Recreation Division; Bill Loeber, Water and Land Resources Division (WRLD); Kathy Creahan, WLRD; Kristi McClelland, WLRD; Linda Vane, Liaison

Chair Nate Veranth called the meeting to order at 9:40 a.m.

Minutes: Motion 1- 0914 That the minutes of the July 10, 2014 meeting be approved. The motion passed unanimously.

### **Staff and Agency Reports and Announcement**

*Hancock Timber Management* – Grady Steere responded to questions from the Commission about Hancock's recent experience with a non-profit organization that is planning to build recreational mountain bike trails on Hancock forestland. Grady explained that the non-profit is working on a programmatic permit with King County Department of Permitting and Environmental Review (DPER). He said that currently the non-profit is maintaining the existing trail network and have created trail maps and online resources that have been useful to their members. Grady added that Hancock monitors vehicle access very closely and has processes in place to close roads when necessary, for example during periods of extreme risk of wildfire.

Doug McClelland reflected on Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) experience with their mountain bike trails. He said that mountain bikers started showing up on DNR trails about 20 years ago. It is a growing sport. He said that DNR came to the realization that they needed to build trails that were designed for that particular use. Mountain bike trails are like miniature roads and should be designed just like a timber sale, he said. Soil types and drainage must be taken into consideration. DNR has a legal mandate to provide for multiple uses, said Doug. DNR guarantees the trails will meet Forest Service standards. DNR now has a programmatic permit from King County for any such trails.

There was a discussion of landowner liability related to public access to forestlands followed. Dick Ryon indicated that RCW Chapter 4.24.200 and 4.24.210 provides significant protection from liability for landowners who allow recreational access to their lands. Doug said that the law has worked well for DNR. He commented that it could be a challenge for large landowners who do a lot of manipulation of the landscape and invite recreation, to adequately identify and advertise potential hazards.

Action: Rex, Doug, Nate, Daryl will serve on a trails subcommittee to follow up with DPER on streamlining soft surface trail permitting processes.

*King Conservation District (KCD)* – Brandy Reed reported that the KCD has submitted a proposed 2015 Plan of Work and an associated System of Rates and Charges to King County. The average proposed per parcel rate is \$9.40 annually. The particular per parcel fees vary depending on land uses. The KCD will provide an Implementation Plan to the County at the request of Council in October, according to Brandy.

There was a discussion of the new services for small forest landowners in the proposed 2015 Program of Work. Ron Baum commented that farmers markets have helped create connections between farms and consumers that have really helped farms. He pointed out that there has been a barrier between the forest and the public. Improving this connection could help forests be more economically productive, according to Ron. He proposed that there is potential for marketing local wood products through the story of the product and its source: where tree grew, who cut it down, who made the product, etc.

Daryl raised the question of if the public sees value in the forest, such as recreation and aesthetics, is there also a way for the owner of the land to realize value such as economic value. An extensive discussion ensued concerning perceptions of the value of forested land, both monetary and non-monetary. Daryl recommended that the KCD help forest owners connect to consumers. Doug reflected on how local forest products might become more visible. Rex Thompson said that forest landowners face a dilemma in monetizing benefits. He explained that there are movements afoot around the country to do that with trails, etc.

Action: The Commission will send a letter of comment on the proposed KCD 2015 Plan of Work and associated System of Rates and Charges.

*Commission Administration* – Linda Vane reminded commissioners to complete the required online trainings for Board and Commission members by the October 31 deadline.

Linda followed up on a proposal by Nate Veranth at the July meeting that the Rural Forest Commission schedule a joint meeting with the Agriculture Commission to explore shared interests and concerns. The consensus of the Commission was to invite the Agriculture Commission to a joint meeting in 2015.

### **Green River Community College forestry curriculum development**

Bill Loeber, Forester, Water & Land Resources Division

Bill reported on the Forestry Program's assistance to Green River Community College (GRCC) on the design of a new training program for foresters, which would lead to a Bachelor's Degree in Applied Forestry. The process involved a gathering of forestry professionals to advise the college administration on skills essential for the practice of forest management in the field. Graduates would be qualified to work in industrial forestry, for non-industrial private forest landowners or in the ecological restoration field.

Dick Ryon commented that there is value in educating foresters here so have skills needed to manage the forests here. This is the advantage of having a program in Washington State and not bringing foresters from out-of-state-schools, he said. He added that GRCC has a strong reputation for developing foresters.

### **University of Washington forestland management curriculum**

David Kimmett, Natural Resource Lands Program/Project Manager, Parks & Recreation Division

David presented a report on a partnership with the University of Washington School of Environmental and Forest Sciences to provide undergraduate and graduate students with an opportunity to gain experience in developing and implementing forest management plans. A special field course used King County's Black Diamond Open Space, Henry's Ridge Open Space, and Ravensdale Retreat Natural Area as outdoor laboratories. Students in the class were tasked with analyzing forest resources and creating a forest stewardship plan for each of the sites. Parks Division and UW staff shared teaching duties.

David said that the course provided students with much needed real world experience and benefited King County by helping Parks and Recreation meet its goal to complete a forest stewardship plan for each of its

forested properties. The County and the UW intend to offer the course again next year with a new group of students and at another site, according to David.

Comments on both Loeber and Kimmett presentations followed:

Cindy Spiry commented that from the Tribes point of view, it is important to consider cultural resource surveys. She said that this is often something that is missed. She suggested that cultural surveys be included in the GRCC and UW curricula.

Bermie McKinney said the Middle Green River Coalition works with interns from GRCC. He has observed that students get excited to see how non-profit organizations work with different agencies and other partners to make things happen. This is outside the curriculum and the kids really like seeing how partnerships work, he said.

Action: The Commission will send a letter to the Director of the Department of Natural Resources and Parks, commending the Parks and Recreation Division and the Water and Land Resources Division on their work to provide Green River Community College and University of Washington forestry students with valuable field experience.

#### **King County Forest Stewardship Update: Island Center Forest and Dockton Forest**

David Kimmett, Natural Resource Lands Program/Project Manager, Parks & Recreation Division

David reported on thinning and harvest conducted on County forest lands on Vashon Island in Island Center Forest in July and August (Douglas fir thinning and alder harvest) and in Dockton Forest (35-year old Douglas fir thinning) in September. David reported that the forest practices went well, but that the public response to the forest practices was of particular interest. As usual, signs were posted along the trails to advise trail users that trails would be closed during the thinning, a press release was sent out, and public meetings were held. The Vashon Island newspaper ran an article about the need to cut trees sometimes to make the forest healthier, he said.

The first comments came via social media on the island, David related. Somewhat to the surprise of staff, he said, island residents expressed alarmed that the County was “cutting old growth” and “cutting down all the cedar.” Evidently, said David, some people on the island had not seen any of the announcements related to the project.

David said that staff responded immediately to all of those who expressed concerns and turned a negative situation into a positive outcome. Parks staff invited all comers to a walking tour the site of one of the thinnings to learn more about it. Staff also designed a new sign to be used at the sites of all future forest practices, which explain the purpose of forest thinning. David said that the response to the additional outreach was very positive. Public opinion changed and the comments became positive when people saw that the thinning created more space for the remaining trees to grow. David stated that this project was a good experience in the value of investing significant resources in educating the public about forest management activities.

#### **Community Service Areas Update: Community Engagement Grants**

Alan Painter, CSA Program Manager, Department of Natural Resources and Parks

Alan provided an update on the activities of the Community Service Areas (CSA) program. The program develops community relations work plans for County departments, holds annual meetings for residents of the CSAs, and offers grants for community-building projects. Alan distributed information about the Community Engagement Grants, which fund projects in unincorporated King County that promote the

engagement of local residents in community or civic activities. He said that grant proposals would be due on December 8, 2014.

There was no public comment.

**Concluding remarks**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:30 p.m.

**Next meeting**

The next meeting will be held on November 13, 2014, at the Preston Community Center.

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